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The Significance of the Insignificant:
Daniel Deronda and the Literature
of Weimar Classicism

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INTRODUCTION: SPINOZA,
THE LITERATURE OF WEIMAR CLASSICISM,
AND HOW ELIOT DISTINGUISHES
MORALITY FROM IDEOLOGY

This article focuses on how George Eliot distinguishes morality from the practices of exclusion that characterize the workings of ideology. Eliot's critique of ideology emerges from her reading of Spinoza and the literature of Weimar Classicism. Spinoza's analysis of theology as anthropomorphism and Goethe and Herder's attempt to develop a new kind of literature that comes close to the impartiality of scientific observation constitute the intellectual background of Eliot's definition of morality. What causes Eliot's discomfort with a possible confusion of the moral with the ideological? There is a striking clash between ideology and what Lawrence Rothfield has called "the 'critical' realism of Balzac, Flaubert, and Eliot."¹ Rothfield links the discourse of critical realism to the meticulousness that characterizes the sciences.² He pinpoints the emergence of critical realism sometime "near the end of the eighteenth century."³ This is precisely the time when Goethe and

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1. Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 8.

2. Rothfield focuses on the relation between realism and the discourse of medicine. He differentiates the ideological from the discursive as follows: "One broad difference between ideology and discourse is that while ideological presuppositions form a part of a widely shared everyday knowledge, discursive assumptions are esoteric" (ibid., 18).

3. Rothfield goes on to discuss this shift in literary style within the context of a new scientific approach: "Sometime near the end of the eighteenth century, however, a

Herder redefined the literary along scientific lines, influenced by Spinoza's scientific approach toward the study of nature.

The first part of this article discusses Eliot's appreciation of an impartial mode of writing that steers free of ideological distortions and that she associates with the literary project of Weimar Classicism. A second issue involved in Eliot's critique of ideology will be discussed in the main part of this article. Ideology in whatever form is based on practices of inclusion and exclusion: ideology refers to morality in order to justify the exclusion of certain groups of people from mainstream society. By distinguishing morality from ideology, Eliot therefore distances morality from practices of exclusion in general and of the exclusion of the Jews in particular. But she does not confine her analysis of ideology to the ethical sphere alone. Instead, she relates ethics to aesthetics and vice versa. Ideology is not only a moral failure; it also produces art that distorts reality. Formally, it is realism that critiques such fictions of the real. Eliot finds in both Spinoza's *Ethics* and the literature of Weimar Classicism intellectual support for this understanding of critical realism.

Finally, I consider Eliot's artistic working through of both Spinoza and the literature of Weimar Classicism. Section II analyzes the character Daniel Deronda as embodiment of the Herderean capability to see the world from another person's point of view. It is this capability that makes him seem morally eccentric and insignificant to society at large. Sections III and IV analyze intertextual references to two Goethe works. It will be shown that here, too, Eliot further develops Goethe's distinction between morality and ideology: her allusions are to two plays by Goethe that recognize those who have been excluded by various ideological practices.

I. THE LEGACY OF SPINOZA AND THE "IMMORAL LITERATURE" OF GOETHE

In the mid-1850s Eliot set out to translate Spinoza's *Ethics*. This translation "was finished (though it was not published) in the spring of

rearrangement—uneven, to be sure, and differently motivated within different national cultures, but forcefully registered by Kant's critiques—occurs within the hierarchy of knowledges. Between the noumenal world of metaphysical philosophy and the phenomenal world of the real, between the world of forms and the empirical world, the sciences are now understood to supervene. The sciences may not provide us with philosophical or absolute knowledge, as Kant points out, but the knowledge they *do* provide, although limited by definition, nevertheless qualifies as the true knowledge of the real" (ibid., 8).

1856.”⁴As part of his critique of Descartes’ mind-body dualism, Spinoza questions the presumed harmony between the mind’s conception of things and the actual constitution of these things.⁵ Spinoza argues that human cognition does not present an accurate account of nature. Instead, it forms “universal ideals of natural things as much as” it does “of artificial ones.”⁶

For an accurate understanding of Eliot’s critique of the alleged immorality of Goethe’s work, it is crucial to take into account Spinoza’s argument that mental constructs are distortions of the real. Spinoza discusses the difficulty of separating the fictional from the mentally constructed as part and parcel of his critical inquiry into the fallacious foundations of certain moral propositions. He argues that the idea of sin comes into being at the point at which the mind realizes how nature diverges from cognitive models: “So when they [human minds] see something happen in Nature which does not agree with the model they [human minds] have conceived of this kind of thing, they believe that Nature itself has failed or sinned, and left the thing imperfect.”⁷ Here then morality itself can fall prey to fictitiousness. If it does so, it becomes immoral, because it labels as sin or failure anything that does not coincide with its cognitive model of the world. In this way morality turns discriminatory and exclusive.

Spinoza thus criticizes a morality that has turned into ideology. At this point the moral can justify the exclusions practiced by the ideological. It is this possible confusion of morality with the exclusionary practices of ideology that is a major concern within the literature of Weimar Classicism. Eliot sees in the literature of Weimar Classicism a force that avoids the subjugation of morality to ideology. Whereas an ideological morality excludes and discriminates against certain groups of people, critical realism attempts to be inclusive. In her essays, Eliot praises the literature of Weimar Classicism for such a large and all-inclusive perspective. The method of German classical literature is that of nonspecialization. As she makes clear in “The Future of German

4. Tim Dolin, *George Eliot* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.

5. Spinoza’s questioning of Descartes’ mind-body divide has a realist agenda: the mind cannot exist without its empirical, corporeal foundation, and so Spinoza calls the mind the idea of the body. According to Rothfield, this interdependence between consciousness and corporeality also marks the literature of critical realism: “Consciousness in realism always inhabits a body that serves as an empirical grounding-point, the site at which death occurs and the truth emerges, like the inky fluid spewing forth from Emma’s mouth after she has killed herself” (Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, 166).

6. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, with an introduction by Stuart Hampshire (London: Penguin, 1996), 114.

7. *Ibid.*

Philosophy,” “Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and Schiller . . . were productive in several departments.”⁸ She goes on to highlight the creative potential of such a nonexclusive approach: “Those who decry versatility—and there are many who do so in other countries besides Germany—seem to forget the immense service rendered by the *suggestiveness* of versatile men, who come to the subject with fresh, unstrained minds.”⁹ It is, however, not only the nonversatile, specialized scholar (whom Eliot calls “exclusive inquirer”¹⁰) who has much to learn from the literature of Germany’s classical age. Related to the issue of versatility, as discussed in the quote above, is the literary attempt to provide an impartial representation of reality: Herder’s and Goethe’s works exemplify a striving for impartiality while always being cognizant that they cannot fully attain a completely unbiased approach. In her characterization of Daniel Deronda, George Eliot illustrates Herder’s theoretical work on versatility as empathy with the oblique, the neglected, and the almost forgotten past. Rather than concur with the judgmental conclusions a given society has established as moral truths, *Deronda* attempts to understand the life and opinions of those who are moral outcasts.

This attitude bears a striking resemblance to Goethe’s refusal to spell out moral judgments, which distinguishes his literary work from much of the moralistic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Significantly, in her essays, Eliot defends Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister* against the charge of constituting immoral literature. In English society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Goethe, as Rosemary Ashton has pointed out, “had been chosen to stand for the general tendency of German literature to corrupt.”¹¹ Eliot then asks, “But is *Wilhelm Meister* an immoral book?”¹² She explains that Goethe’s lack of moral bias does not make him an immoral writer. An impartial approach accounts for this lack of direct moral judgment, and itself produces a text capable of gripping the reader’s attention: “As long as you keep to an apparently impartial narrative of facts you will have earnest eyes fixed on you in rapt attention, but no sooner do you begin to betray symptoms of an intention to moralise, or to

8. George Eliot, “The Future of German Philosophy,” in *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge, 1963), 149.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800–1860* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 148.

12. George Eliot, “The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*,” in Pinney, *Essays of George Eliot*, 144.

turn the current of facts towards a personal application, than the interest of your hearer will slacken, his eyes will wander, and the moral dose will be doubly distasteful from the very sweet-meat in which you have attempted to insinuate it."¹³ And yet, Eliot acknowledges that a state of impartiality can never be fully reached. The writer who aims at a nonbiased representation of characters thus composes "an apparently impartial narrative." Impartiality has, therefore, an impact on literary style.

What, however, are the implications of an impartial literary style for an accurate understanding of the immorality inherent in harsh moral judgments? Literature that sets out to present narratives in an impartial and realistic mode enables its readers to learn from particulars rather than abstractions. Eliot clearly attributes greater pedagogical potential to an attention to anthropological particularity than to the generality of moral rules: "But a few are taught by their own falls and their own struggles, by their experience of sympathy, and help and goodness in the 'publicans and sinners' of these modern days, that the line between the virtuous and the vicious, so far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is itself an immoral fiction."¹⁴ Here she contrasts the existential ("their own falls and their own struggles") with the cognitively constructed ("the line between the virtuous and the vicious"). She differentiates between actions and the moralistic meaning that is imposed upon them. The gulf that separates the existential (the realm of actions and nature's causality) from the cognitive construction of meaning gives rise to anthropomorphic fiction, a phenomenon Spinoza analyzed in his *Ethics*.¹⁵ These anthropomorphic fictions are ideological because they serve to justify discriminations against certain groups of people. For example, according to Spinoza anthropomorphism depicts God as someone who wages war against certain communities in the same way in which human societies do.

In her essay on *Wilhelm Meister*, Eliot takes forward Spinoza's critique of anthropomorphism when she focuses on the exclusionary force of moral judgments. She appreciates the Spinozist heritage by way of Goethe's work. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Spinoza was commonly identified as the prime cause responsible for the presumed immorality of Goethe's writings. In fact, the famous Spinoza controversy was triggered by Lessing's enthusiasm for Goethe's poem

13. *Ibid.*, 145.

14. *Ibid.*, 147.

15. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Michael Mack, "Spinoza's Non-hierarchical Vision," forthcoming in *Telos*.

"Prometheus."¹⁶ An espousal of Goethe's work thus testified to one's Spinozist affiliations. In what ways did Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in particular and the literature of Weimar Classicism in general inform the conception of *Daniel Deronda*? As Marc E. Wohlfarth has pointed out, Eliot composed her last novel in the form of the Bildungsroman.¹⁷ It thus of course defines itself in relation to *Wilhelm Meister*, the locus classicus of this generic type. Most important, the theme of nationalism as discussed in *Daniel Deronda* has its historical and intellectual point of reference in the writer, poet, theologian, and cultural critic Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder was the first to make the case for the national independence of ethnic groups that were oppressed by imperial rule. His work was thus the driving force behind Eastern European and Jewish strivings to recuperate a national identity. Saleel Nurbhai and K. M. Newton have recently shown that the "form of nationalism favored by Eliot was of an anti-imperialist nature. It was associated with the desire to replace domination with self-determination—a similar motivation to that which provoked the struggles of the working classes and which could be interpreted in kabbalistic terms as the golems' search for self-awareness."¹⁸ The reference to the kabbalah and to the golem might well be pertinent in the present context. It is, however, equally true that Eliot derived her specific understanding of an anti-imperialist nationalism from Herder's cultural theory. In an important study Bernard Semmel has thus traced Eliot's support of "cultural pluralism" to the "eighteenth-century German historian whom she referred to as 'the great Herder' [Eliot to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray and Sara Hennell, August 5, 1849]."¹⁹

16. See Gérard Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations between Lessing and Jacobi: Text with Excerpts from the Ensuing Controversy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988).

17. See Marc E. Wohlfarth, "Daniel Deronda and the Politics of Nationalism," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53 (1998): 192.

18. Saleel Nurbhai and K. M. Newton, *George Eliot, Judaism, and the Novels: Jewish Myth and Mysticism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 153.

19. Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 13. Semmel goes on to characterize Herder as "a cultural nationalist and a pluralist who delighted in the interplay of environment, historical period, and national character that produced the poetry, the music, the art, the politics, and the society that were inherent in the nature and development of the profoundly different national organisms" (ibid.). The general relevance of Herder's anti-imperialist approach to diverse national communities has also been noted by Hao Li in his discussion of *Daniel Deronda*: "The cultural concept of nationalism is largely derived from Herder's idea of *Volksgeist* which stands for a natural, spontaneous and non-political tradition. . . . Eliot thus resembles Herder in attitude. . . . This emphasis on cultural traits defines the oft-noted unwavering belief in cultural 'separateness with communication' (*DD*, 60:673) in *Daniel Deronda*" (Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot: Transfiguring the Past* [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000], 156–57).

A significant upshot of Herder's and Goethe's study of Spinoza is their respective appreciation of diversity in human and natural history. The textual and thematic references in *Daniel Deronda* to writers and works of Weimar Classicism thus have as their focal point the legacy of Spinoza's writing and thought. The novel's narrative voice associates the figure of Mordecai with that of Spinoza. Both live on the margins of society: the "consumptive-looking Jew, apparently a fervid student of some kind, getting his crust by quiet handicraft"²⁰ resembles in his lifestyle the seventeenth century philosopher Spinoza (he is "like Spinoza" [472]). The two intellectuals share a voluntary affiliation with the poor and other social outcasts.

Mordecai's historical consciousness, however, opens up a gulf that distinguishes his thought from that of the seventeenth-century philosopher. In his slightly dismissive approach toward history and language, Spinoza clearly clings to Descartes' ideal of scientific inquiry. His *Theological-Political Treatise* sharply differentiates between philosophical truth and the unreliability of historical knowledge: "Again," he emphasizes, "philosophy rests on the basis of universally valid axioms, and must be constructed by studying Nature alone, whereas faith is based on history and language."²¹ As George Levine has pointed out, with Mordecai, by contrast, Eliot acknowledges "the connection between science and what appears to be mysticism."²² The Spinozist thought of Goethe's and Herder's works fills this gap that separates the end of the seventeenth from the middle of the nineteenth century.

The relationship between Charles Darwin's scientific inquiry and Eliot's literary work is pertinent to this discussion. As Gillian Beer has shown, Darwin set the tone for Victorian scientific inquiry precisely by unfolding his explorations through a deliberately unstable, mythic, and poetic linguistic register. He presents his thought in the multivalence of metaphor and in what Gillian Beer has called "an imaginative reordering of experience."²³ What precisely characterizes

20. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Penguin, 1995), 471-72. Page numbers from this edition hereafter cited parenthetically in text.

21. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley, with introduction and notes by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 169.

22. George Levine, "George Eliot's Hypothesis of Reality," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 35 (1980): 19.

23. As Beer has put it, "The form of Darwin's sentence is often optative, 'we may,' not absolute. . . . The 'great facts' which Darwin perceived were expressed through a profusion of metaphor; they demanded an imaginative reordering of experience. *The Origin of Species* was itself a work which could only too readily be cast by its critics as speculative and utopian, fascinated with its own ethnography in the style of Utopias from Thomas More on" (Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plot: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* [Cambridge University Press, 2000], 95).

the poetic and speculative element of Darwin's writing and thought? Here too Spinoza's philosophy of nature was influential. Darwin received Spinoza's idea through the mediation of the literature of Weimar Classicism (that of Goethe in particular, whose work incorporates both fiction and scientific inquiry).²⁴

As a consequence of his literary education, Darwin deepens and develops Spinoza's antiteleological and antihierarchical critique of anthropocentrism. Gillian Beer refers to Darwin's "copious imagination" that draws upon "the richness of the perceptual world."²⁵ This literary and imaginative approach furthers Darwin's Spinozist aversion to both hierarchical constructions and teleological explanations of natural phenomena: "Because it refused the notion of precedent Idea with its concomitant assumption of preordained Design, Darwin's method of description placed great emphasis upon congruities within the multiple materiality of the world."²⁶ Darwin's Spinozist refutation of a teleological order has serious consequences for the plot of the Victorian novel: "The question of congruity between language and physical order is evidently related to teleological issues, just as narrative order brings sharply into focus the question of precedent design. Victorian novelists increasingly seek a role for themselves within the language of the text as observer and experimenter, rather than as designer or god. Omniscience goes, omnipotence is concealed."²⁷ The eclipse of teleology gives rise to the elevation of that which has commonly been demoted to insignificance in a vertical order of things. Spinoza attempted to make the insignificant philosophically significant. The exclusionary mechanisms implicit in ideology make room for a nonideological and thus nonhierarchical understanding of morality. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Spinoza was infamous for having pulled down the hierarchical divide between the realms of the transcendent (God and the mind) and the immanent (nature and the body). Goethe and his former mentor Herder set out to adapt this Spinozist undertaking to the changed context of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They took issue with some tendencies in Enlightenment thought that condemned both the poetic-mythic and the historical past to insignificance.

This brief account of Spinozism and its influence on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature sets the stage for the following discussion

24. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

25. Beer, *Darwin's Plot*, 73.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, 40.

of Eliot's characterization of *Deronda* as personifying the significance of the insignificant. By so doing, Eliot distinguishes between morality and practices of exclusion that characterize the workings of ideology. Ultimately I will consider the so far neglected role of two Goethe works alluded to in *Daniel Deronda*: *Tasso* and *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. Eliot refers to these two plays in passages that question the exclusion of Jews from Victorian society. She thus refers to Goethe's work in order to distinguish between morality and discriminatory practices of ideology.

II. HERDER'S HISTORICAL REASON AND DERONDA'S POETICS OF THE EVERYDAY

As I have discussed in my 2003 book *German Idealism and the Jew*, important strands within Enlightenment thought tended to characterize Jews and Judaism as insipid. Within the latter part of the eighteenth century, modernity was seen to demote the historical past to insignificance, and the future of humanity seemed to promise its immanent perfectibility. I have shown how these attempts at constructing a "perfect" otherworldly world within this one were premised on the exclusion of worldly imperfections.²⁸ Judaism and the Jews represented these bodily remainders of contingency and a political as well as ethical deficiency: it was thought that with the progress of history, worldly imperfections would vanish from the world just as Jews and Judaism would cease to exist in the perfect modern state of the future.

Voltaire was the first to coin the expression "philosophy of history" when he published the introduction to his vast historical work *Essai sur les mœurs* separately under the title *La Philosophie de l'Histoire* (1765). In his *Essai* Voltaire poked fun at Jewish history and dismissed its moral, cultural, and historical validity.²⁹ In response to Voltaire's ridicule of both Judaism and Jewishness, Herder declared that he becomes a Jew when he reads the Old Testament. In his *Letters Concerning the Study of Theology*, Herder thus contrasts his understanding of historical reason with Voltaire's philosophical approach: "You see," he addresses the reader, "how sacred and valuable I find these [Jewish] books and how much—as a response to Voltaire's mockery—I am a Jew, when I read them, for do we not have to be a Greek or a Roman when we read Greeks and Romans? Each book has to be read in its contextual

28. For an in-depth discussion of this problematic, see Michael Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

29. See Adam Suttcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231–46.

spirit.”³⁰ Turning to *Daniel Deronda*, this mode of historical empathy distinguishes Deronda’s attitude toward the oblique and the foreign from that of other representatives of English culture such as Mr. Grandcourt. As a young man Deronda implicitly subscribes to a Herderean notion of historical reason. His patron Sir Hugo “let him quit Cambridge and pursue a more independent line of study abroad. The germs of this inclination had been already stirring in his boyish love of universal history, which made him want to be at home in foreign countries, and follow in imagination the travelling students of the middle ages. He longed to have the apprenticeship to life which would not shape him too definitely, and rob him of the choices that might come from free growth” (180). This passage foregrounds Deronda’s Herderean empathy with the spatially and temporally distant: he “wants to be at home in foreign countries,” and he sets out to imitate the boundary-crossing travel arrangements that formed a substantial part of the educational curriculum of the Middle Ages. His ideal of an interdisciplinary apprenticeship also evokes the notion of *Bildung* that informs Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*. Eliot, as we have seen, recommends such nonspecialist approach in her essays (as will be discussed below).³¹

Ironically, Deronda discovers his identity through such apparent loss of selfhood. He empathizes with the despised and the oblique, and yet this empathy makes him literarily find himself in the other. Eliot dwells on his “strong tendency to side with objects of prejudice” (206). This is not say that she unrealistically removes him from exposure to

30. “Sie sehen, mein Fr, wie heilig und hehr mir diese Bücher sind, und wie sehr ich (nach Voltair’s Spott) ein Jude bin, wenn ich sie lese: denn müssen wir nicht Griechen und Römer sein, wenn wir Griechen und Römer lesen? Jedes Buch muß in seinem Geiste gelesen werden” (Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Briefed as Studium der Theologie Betreffend*, in *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, ed. Bernhard Suphan [Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1879], 143). Goethe followed Herder’s approach as emphasized in Goethe’s autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. See *Goethes Werke*, vol. 9, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: Beck, 1982), 140.

31. Here an intriguing parallel to George Eliot’s previous novel *Middlemarch* emerges. Gillian Beer has astutely analyzed how Eliot’s other late novel calls into question the scientific and social validity of unitary forms of life and meaning: “The typical concern of the intellectual characters of the book [i.e., *Middlemarch*] is with visions of unity, but a unity which seeks to resolve the extraordinary diversities of the world back into a single answer; the key to all mythologies, the primitive tissue, allegorical painting (Ladislaw mocks Naumann: ‘I do *not* think that all the universe is straining towards the obscure significance of your pictures’ [1:19:290]). Casaubon and Dorothea, for different reasons, are distressed by the miscellaneity of Rome, where the remains of different cultures are all typographically jostling each other, apparently without hierarchy of meaning” (Beer, *Darwin’s Plot*, 162). Deronda’s appreciation of the diverse thus offers an alternative to Causabon and Lydgate’s respective quest for single origins.

anti-Jewish sentiments. She makes clear that "Deronda could not escape (who can?) knowing ugly stories of Jewish characteristics and occupations; and though one of his favorite protests was against the severance of past and present history, he was like others who shared his protest, in never having cared to reach any more special conclusions about Jews than that they retained the virtues and vices of a long oppressed race" (206). The narrative voice of Eliot's last novel characterizes the status of Judaism within Victorian society as nothing else but "as a sort of eccentric fossilised form which an accomplished man might dispense with studying and leave to specialists" (363). Significantly, the higher echelons of English society classify Deronda as someone who is socially irrelevant, that is to say, as someone who is only of specialist interest: he appears an insignificant eccentric.

It is precisely Deronda's sympathetic approach to those who do not conform to a code of propriety that makes him seem eccentric. As the narrator points out, "Daniel had the stamp of rarity in a subdued fervor of sympathy, an activity of imagination on behalf of others, which did not show itself effusively, but was continually seen in acts of considerateness that struck his companions as moral eccentricity" (178). In a truly versatile manner Deronda thus combines moral qualities (sympathy) with the gift of the artist (imagination). For Mr. Grandcourt such eccentricity reduces a person's social significance. Deronda's lack of status makes Gwendolen compare his position with that of Mrs. Glasher and her children (chap. 29). What connects Deronda to Mrs. Glasher is that they share the context of social exclusion. Gwendolen makes the connection:

Gwendolen, whose unquestioning habit it had been to take the best that came to her for less than her own claim, had now to see the position which tempted her in a new light, as a hard, unfair exclusion of others. What she had heard about Deronda seemed to her imagination to throw him into one group with Mrs Glasher and her children; before whom she felt herself in an attitude of apology—she who had hitherto been surrounded by a group that in her opinion had need to be apologetic to her. Perhaps Deronda was himself thinking these things. Could he know of Mrs Glasher? (335)

Through an acquaintance with the fate of Mrs. Glasher and her children, Gwendolen is suddenly confronted with the dark side of success. The passage quoted above enters into her internal dialogue about the ambiguity of gain. Does gain have a relation to loss? Deronda seems to figure as the conscience within her internal dispute about the sustainability of her path toward social and financial success. She seems to know the risk associated with her marriage, and yet she marries nevertheless.

Deronda plays such a marginal role in the “English part” of the novel precisely because his presence is repressed: Gwendolen’s repression of her affection for him is symptomatic of the way in which Deronda’s personality does not seem to be socially acceptable. Only through this suppression of the knowledge of her affection for Deronda is Gwendolen able to conform to the ideology that prescribes marriage to women as a path to social advancement. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, ideology does not primarily have the function of an illusion. On the contrary, the ideological denotes reality: “ideology is not simply ‘false consciousness’, an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological—‘*ideological*’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence—that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals ‘do not know what they are doing.’”³² Gwendolen’s sense of reality would collapse if she were not to marry Grandcourt. She is not interested in Grandcourt as an individual—in stark contrast to her real but repressed interest in Deronda. The novel offers an extraordinarily subtle presentation, over some three hundred pages, of Gwendolen’s reasons for marrying Grandcourt. This presentation focuses on her incompletely acknowledged attraction to Deronda and the social pressures that make her choose marriage as an illusory attainment of freedom. The marriage to Grandcourt is certainly not a romantic affair. Instead it offers the prospect of social respectability and financial independence.

In her external dealings, Gwendolen has to focus on Grandcourt and avoid Deronda. This has to be reality if she wants to be consistent with the demands of the ideology that governs her society. Conversely, in the internal dialogue (as quoted above) she focuses on Deronda. Significantly, she asks whether he might know of Mrs. Glasher. She seems to fear knowledge. She wants to repress the relation between gain and loss, which Deronda seems to bring to light. This knowledge of the coincidence between failure and success preconditions Deronda’s imaginative sympathy; for him this division within humanity does not exist. At the end of the novel he is not an ethnocentric nationalist, and, as Kwame Anthony Appiah has recently pointed out, “in claiming a Jewish loyalty—an ‘added soul’—Deronda is not rejecting a human one.”³³

What thematic and structural role does Deronda’s imaginative sympathy play within the larger ambit of the novel? *Daniel Deronda* has

32. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 21.

33. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), xvii.

often been criticized for a lack of compositional coherence. Deirdre David has described the novel as “fatally, if seductively, split, for Eliot is unable to reconcile her fine study in psychological and social realism with the strange, difficult and sometimes virtually unreadable *Deronda* narrative of Jewish identity.”³⁴ Why does this issue of disconnection figure so prominently in critical discussions of a work of fiction whose narrative strands set out to interconnect that which seems to be disjointed? Gillian Beer has rightly taken issue with the posited dualism of English and Jewish society: “Indeed, to conceive of Jews and English entirely in dualistic terms misses the point that what Eliot is exploring in the novel is not polarity but common sources: the common culture, story, and genetic inheritance of which the Jews and the English are two particularly strongly interconnected expressions, which raises questions of transmission.”³⁵ Yet critics tend to allocate a binding force only to the miraculous, quasi-fairy tale nature of the novel: so far they have exclusively allocated this connecting force to its Jewish strand. George Levine has thus discussed *Daniel Deronda* in terms of Eliot’s break with the previous realism of *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt*, and *Middlemarch*.³⁶ He attributes this break to *Deronda*’s and Mordecai’s impractical idealism.

How, though, did Eliot define realism in her preceding work? In the famous chapter of *Adam Bede*, entitled “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” she explains how inclusion of the oblique and the socially insignificant distinguishes a realistic mode of writing from a style geared to aesthetic rules and lofty theories: “Therefore let Art always remind us of them” (i.e., “old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded back and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world”); “therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things—men who see beauty in these

34. Deirdre David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels: “North and South,” “Our Mutual Friend,” “Daniel Deronda,”* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 135.

35. Beer, *Darwin’s Plot*, 182.

36. Levine discusses this break with realism in relation to *Middlemarch* as follows: “Had Dorothea responded with Celia’s revulsion from Casaubon’s hairy mole, and with Mrs. Cadwallader’s sensible alertness to the disparity of age, she would never have imagined Casaubon as Milton. But in *Daniel Deronda* common sense, like common life, is essentially a danger and a distortion. The world of the realistic novel is irrevocably in fragments—the church turned stable, the American Civil War commenting on Gwendolen’s egoistic concerns, family ties shattered, English culture a mere façade of wealth and aristocracy” (Levine, “George Eliot’s Hypothesis,” 18).

commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them.”³⁷ Her realist mode of writing, thus, defamiliarizes what has become familiar. It endows the everyday with an aura of the miraculous. In this approach Eliot subscribes to a nonutilitarian understanding of the factual, an element common to Victorian writing and thought.³⁸

According to Eliot, realism discovers the significance of the seemingly insignificant. It brings to the fore the aesthetic (“beauty in these commonplace things”) and the spiritual (“delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them”) quality of commonplace things. This is, however, precisely Daniel Deronda’s approach.³⁹ The narrative voice of Eliot’s last novel evokes the famous chapter on realism in *Adam Bede* when it describes Daniel as neither romantic nor empiricist: “To say that Deronda was romantic would be to misrepresent him; but under his calm and somewhat self-repressed exterior there was a fervor which made him easily find poetry and romance among the events of everyday life” (205). I believe that Deronda’s poetics of everyday life establishes a connective thread between the Jewish and the English strands of the novel.

In order to address this issue, it is necessary to look at the opening chapter where Daniel seems to cast an ironic gaze on Gwendolen who is enthralled by her pursuit of gain while gambling. To him, who sees

37. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, with an introduction by Leonee Ormond (London: Everyman, 1996), 201.

38. Beer has pointed out how this romantic type of materialism characterizes both Darwin’s science and late nineteenth-century literature: “In the process of Darwin’s thought, one movement is constantly repeated: the impulse to substantiate metaphor and particularly to find a real place for older mythological expressions. He has an almost equal satisfaction in alerting us to the mysterious in *fact* (and here we can see the influence of Carlyle, whose prodigious linguistic energy goes into recuperating the past and reviving the marvel of the everyday). The grotesque, the beautiful and the wonderful in the everyday was a major Victorian imaginative theme” (Beer, *Darwin’s Plot*, 74).

39. The appreciation of insignificance has a point of reference in both various Jewish and Christian sources. In this respect E. S. Shaffer has analyzed Daniel Deronda as a Jesus figure. She makes it clear that Eliot stands in stark contrast to the institutional interpretation of Jesus. As Shaffer emphasizes, Eliot takes into account the historical critical perspective of Friedrich Strauss and others: “Strauss and Feuerbach are equally important here, Strauss in understanding religious experience as myth, Feuerbach in understanding the unity of man to reside not in the solitary ego but in the species being, in the sexual man and woman taken as one. Renan is important too, but in the negative sense that his early life of Jesus is corrected and rewritten in accordance with a deeper grasp of the principles of the higher criticism and a novelist’s power of searching out the intricacies of mutual dependence” (Shaffer, “*Kubla Khan*” and *the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770–1880* [Cambridge University Press, 1975], 181).

poetry in everyday life, the exorbitant commercial glamour of the Leubronn casino appears to be “dull” (9). Alluding to this opening scene of the novel, Gwendolen will later justify her passion for gambling by saying that it “is a refuge from dulness [*sic*],” to which Daniel responds that “what we call the dulness of things is a disease in ourselves” (411). What causes this disease that makes the commonplace appear to be dull and insignificant? Gwendolen’s passion for gambling has a striking relation to the presence of market economic transactions. Gambling and the market economy are driven by a desire for gain. The notion of “gain” relies on the existence of its opposite, namely, “loss.”

This binary opposition between gain and loss shapes a hierarchical division that separates the valuable from the valueless, the significant from the insignificant. Deronda’s openness to the poetry within the realism of the everyday confounds various economic, ethnic, and social hierarchies. Those who differentiate between loss and gain subscribe to a judgmental way of thinking. Deronda’s “keenly perceptive sympathetic emotiveness,” which does not go without a “speculative tendency” (496), refrains from judging human life according to a gain-loss equation. On the contrary, “what he felt was a profound sensibility to a cry from the depth of another soul; and accompanying that, the summons to be receptive instead of superciliously prejudging” (496). Deronda’s receptiveness may have roots in Herder’s understanding of reason as a historical as well as an anthropological sensitivity. Eliot’s depiction of Deronda’s “profound sensibility to a cry from the depth of another soul” is influenced by Herder’s conception of empathy as the capacity to feel oneself into (*fühle dich hinein*) the psychic position of someone else.⁴⁰ Rational inquiry presupposes the capacity to put oneself into the place of another, across the divides that separate the present from the past and the culturally distant from the familiar. Herder defines reason as the ability to listen: *Vernunft* (reason) is *Vernehmen* (to receive, to listen). Deronda’s receptivity to the oblique, the despised, and the historical past in fact offers an intriguing illustration of Herder’s understanding of reason as active listening.⁴¹ Deronda does not confine history to the realm of the dead. Instead, he engages in a conversation with the almost forgotten past and thereby discovers his identity. He thinks “himself imaginatively into the experience of

40. Johann Gottfried von Herder does so in *This Too a Philosophy of History*, in his *Werke: Band 1 Herder und der Sturm und Drang, 1764–1774*, ed. Wolfgang Pross (Munich: Hanser, 1984), 612.

41. See Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Werke: Band III/1 Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. Wolfgang Pross (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 133.

others" (511). This receptive quality bridges temporal as well as geographical and cultural divisions. It presupposes the collapse of hierarchical rankings and ideological exclusions.

III. THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF THE TASSO MOTIVE

Critics have so far paid little attention to various intertextual references to the literature of Weimar Classicism in Eliot's last novel.⁴² This article offers the first detailed analysis of allusions in *Daniel Deronda* to two plays that Goethe composed during his Weimar period. And a critique of hierarchical rankings and ideological exclusions lies at the heart of various allusions to two Goethe works in *Daniel Deronda*.

This section will analyze how the scandal surrounding Klesmer's marriage to Catherine, the daughter of Mrs. Arrowpoint, draws on Goethe's play about Tasso's breach of social proprieties. The drama (*Ein Schauspiel*, in Goethe's words) *Torquato Tasso* focuses on two conceptions of art: one sees the arts as a means of reinforcing class status, whereas the other questions this conception of aesthetics as conforming to various social, economic, and ethnic hierarchies. Goethe's *Tasso* emphasizes the nonhierarchical nature of artistic work. On this view art establishes the interdependence of human difference, be it in terms of class, ethnicity, or gender. Goethe thus endows *Tasso* with a Spinozist poetics: poetry (and, by implication, other forms of creativity) exemplifies human interconnectedness. The aesthetic realm thus illustrates Spinoza's dictum that "man is a God to man" (*hominem homini deum esse*).⁴³

In her translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1854), Eliot employs a phrase similar to Spinoza's "*hominem homini deum esse*." Here, however, the focus is on suffering rather than on Spinozist joy in the preservation of life: "Nothing else than this: to

42. The specific allusions to Goethe's *Tasso* and his *Iphigenie auf Tauris* are not, however, the only textual references to the literature of Weimar Classicism. For example, Mrs. Meyrick's daughter Mab discusses the biblical Book of Revelations in the light of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*: "Call it a chapter in Revelations," Mab explains to her mother, "It makes me sorry for everybody. It makes me like Schiller—I want to take the world in my arms and kiss it" (*Deronda*, 198). Mab is paraphrasing Schiller's *Ode to Joy*: "Seid umschlungen Millionen! / Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!" ("Be embraced, you millions / I give this kiss to the whole world!") (Friedrich Schiller, *Werke*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Goepfert [Munich: Hanser, 1980], 133). On this view Schiller's poetry thus outlines an inclusive universalism.

43. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 133, and his *Opera*, vol. 2, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Winter, 1925), 234.

suffer for others is divine; he who suffers for others, who lays down his life for them, acts divinely, is a God to men."⁴⁴ Goethe's play *Tasso* depicts this kind of suffering: the poet Tasso suffers on account of social hierarchies, but he also alleviates suffering through the composition of poetry. Tasso primarily remedies his suffering through his creative work, and yet his creative work, has a social aspect because it aims to assist its audience in the difficulties they may encounter in their lives. Poetry represents a divinely human gift to remedy injustice and inequality.

The Tasso motive of the novel therefore connects Deronda's non-judgmental approach to the all-pervasive theme that centers on issues of loss and gain. But Eliot reworks central elements of Goethe's drama *Tasso*. In what follows I analyze how a subplot in *Daniel Deronda* inverts the tragic outcome of Goethe's play about the Italian Renaissance poet. In Goethe's drama, Tasso commits a faux pas by giving the impression of proposing to marry Leonora, the sister of the Duke of Ferrara. Why does this accusation pave the way to his social death? In proposing to Leonora, Tasso violates the feudal hierarchy that governs his society. He thus defiles the court that has employed him as a literary servant. In Goethe's play, Tasso often articulates his discontent with his position. In this way he compares his life to that of a prisoner. By contrast, poetry represents to him a signifying space free of the social hierarchy.

In an important subplot within *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot deftly rearranges the story line of Goethe's play: she focuses attention on the theme of gain and loss. It is this promise of gain that infuses the social order with a quasi-libidinal aura. In Eliot's account, however, gain loses its appeal. In the main plot of the novel the prospect of success sets free libidinal energy. This energy dissipates itself in the construction of a fantasy. The fantasy in question here confers meaning on a life that triumphs over those who have failed socially and financially. A case in point is of course Gwendolen. Her story illustrates the quasi-erotic appeal of gain: she marries in order to advance socially and financially. Crucially, the subplot that inverts Tasso's tragic violation of the social order depicts libidinal attachment as rupture with the social hierarchy, dividing those who gain from those who lose. The Tasso motive is crucial because it offers a striking contrast to Klesmer and his beloved's break with the social order. The daughter of the wealthy and would-be aristocratic Mrs. Arrowpoint marries the musician Klesmer

44. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans, 2nd ed. (London: Trübner, 1881), 60.

(employed by her mother in a way similar to Tasso's position as literary servant at court) and thus loses her social and financial position—she abandons her heritage. The Klesmer couple thus reinterprets loss as gain. In doing so, it enacts Tasso's critique of the social order that gives consistency and quasi-libidinal appeal to various constructions of social hierarchy.

The Klesmer couple offers a striking contrast to Gwendolen's marriage. For Gwendolen, hierarchy imbues everyday life with an air of excitement. This is so because a hierarchical structure holds out the promise of gain. Here she can prove her superiority. Life as such is dull. It only becomes stimulating in the moment of triumph. True, both the market and the gambling hall seem to disregard class, ethnic, and gender differences. This state of equality is deceptive, however. Gambling establishes an equal playing field in order to test the strong pleasures of its participants: "Those who were taking their pleasure at a higher strength, and were absorbed in play, showed very distant varieties of European type: Livonian and Spanish, Graeco-Italian and miscellaneous German, English aristocratic and English plebeian. Here certainly was a striking admission of human equality" (8). This concession to egalitarianism gives way to the agonistic principle of gain and loss.

Ironically, gambling does not establish Gwendolen's superiority; rather, it causes the loss of her necklace. Deronda sees the irony, but he does not judge her. On the contrary he assists her by redeeming her necklace (330). His nonhierarchical perception of reality is such that he does not condemn those who participate in the hierarchy of the gain-loss formula. The novel narrates how those who lose are in fact those who desire gain. Gwendolen's gambling disaster, on a micro-cosmic level, foreshadows the loss of her family fortune due to market speculation. Mrs. Davilow explains this state of affairs to Gwendolen. Mr. Lassmann, who dissipated the wealth of the family on the market, actually meant to increase it. Gwendolen, however, accuses Lassmann of theft; to which Mrs. Davilow replies, "No, dear, you don't understand. There were great speculations: he meant to gain. It was all about mines and things of this sort. He risked too much" (233). Wished-for gain thus leads to loss.

Gwendolen does not learn the true nature of the relation between gain and loss. She remains ignorant, and her ignorance ultimately causes her tragedy. She succumbs to a tragic blindness. As the epigraph to chapter 21 makes clear, her will to power is the offspring of ignorance ("who having a practiced vision may not see that ignorance of the true bond between events, and false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled—like that falsity of eyesight which

overlooks the gradations of distance, seeing that which is afar off as if it were within a step or a grasp—precipitates the mistaken soul on destruction?” [227]). Yet her marriage to Mr. Grandcourt seems to enable her to scale the hierarchical ladder that promises a firm grasp of social prestige and significance. Her attainment of power is thus the outcome of not knowledge but ignorance. In this way, the epigraph to chapter 21 poses the question as to the entanglement of power with powerlessness: “It is a common sentence that Knowledge is power; but who hath duly considered or set forth the power of ignorance?” (227). The power of ignorance is precisely the enticement of ideology. Gwendolen attempts to establish a position of influence not knowing that this quest for supremacy will make her powerless. The ruin of her family fortunes makes her “taste the bitterness of insignificance” (292). Her marriage to the wealthy and influential Mr. Grandcourt seems to offer a way out of social and economic obscurity. Grandcourt’s name encapsulates the hierarchical nature of his life. Yet this court will imprison Gwendolen. She pays scant attention to the fact that the gain-loss relation not only determines the economic and ethnic spheres of social hierarchy but also shapes gender relations. This is why, as a woman, she cannot gain through marriage. Her economic and social gain is thus bound to turn out a loss.

Here the gain-loss theme connects Gwendolen to the Jewish strand of the novel. Both Jews and women are defined by a loss of action. The epigraph to chapter 51 describes the Greek poetess Erinna as emblematic of the gender hierarchies within society:

Erinna is condemned
To Spin the byssus drearily
In insect-labour, while the throng
Of Gods and men wrought deeds that poets wrought in song.

(624)

In chapter 42 Mordecai differentiates the Greek from the Jewish people along lines that separate activity from passivity. Gentile children “admire the bravery of those who fought foremost at Marathon. . . . But the Jew has no memory that binds him to action” (529). Gwendolen attempts to gain room for action through her marriage to Grandcourt. She marries in order to obtain “rank and luxuries” (669), and yet the court of her married life turns out to be a gilded prison.

She has “no choice but to endure insignificance and servitude” (315). The reference to insignificance and servitude has a parallel in Goethe’s *Tasso*. This parallel has a rather ironic bearing on Gwendolen’s ignorant gain-loss calculation. In Goethe’s play *Tasso* frequently characterizes

himself as being confined to a state of servitude as the subject of Alfons II, Duke of Ferrara. In a subplot that connects the novel's Jewish and English strands, a reversal of Tasso's tragedy takes place that starkly contrasts with the misery of Gwendolen's marriage.

Here the heroine and the hero perceive the unity of binary opposites. They forsake the gain of family fortune and thus avoid the tragedy of loss.⁴⁵ In this subplot the German-Jewish musician figures as a modern reincarnation of Goethe's Tasso. He marries the daughter of Mrs. Arrowpoint. Mrs. Arrowpoint tells Gwendolen of her intention to write a book about Tasso. "So many," she declares, "have written about Tasso, but they are all wrong." She goes on to comment on the theme of madness, imprisonment and marriage: "As to the particular nature of his [i.e., Tasso's] madness, his feelings for Leonora, and the real cause of his imprisonment, and the character of Leonora, who, in my opinion is a cold-hearted woman, else she would have married him in spite of her brother, they are all wrong. I differ from everybody" (46). Ironically, the subplot of her daughter's love affair—rather than Mrs. Arrowpoint's book project—differs from the main plot of Goethe's *Tasso*. In the novel, Mrs. Arrowpoint in fact plays the role of Leonora's brother: she interdicts her daughter's marriage to Klesmer. In the play the Italian poet stands condemned for his breach of social propriety. He breaks social hierarchies when he seems to propose to Leonora, the sister of the Duke of Ferrara. Mrs. Arrowpoint's daughter, by contrast, marries the German-Jewish artist. In so doing she severely disappoints her mother, who wants her to marry Mr. Grandcourt.

This marriage designates gain, whereas the union with Klesmer amounts to a loss of social and economic power. Mrs. Arrowpoint castigates her daughter Catherine for her intention to become the fiancée of the German-Jewish musician: "You will be a public fable. Every one will say that you must have made the offer to a man who has been paid to come to the house—who is nobody knows what—a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth" (246). In response to this onslaught Catherine evokes the genius of Tasso: "Never mind, mamma. . . . We know he [i.e., Klesmer] is a genius—as Tasso was" (246). Mrs. Arrowpoint then reminds her daughter that it is "a woman's duty not to lower herself" (247). Catherine abandons her position within the hierarchical

45. Esther in *Felix Holt* offers an intriguing comparison to this embrace of loss. After having rejected Harold Transome's marriage proposal and after having married the destitute Felix Holt, Esther gains prominence as someone who "had renounced wealth, and chosen to be the wife of a man who said he would always be poor" (George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. William Baker and Kenneth Womack [Peterborough: Broadview, 2000], 505).

gradation that shapes Victorian society. She marries Klesmer, and her parents disinherit her. Is her loss really a loss? Unlike Goethe's play, Catherine and Klesmer's story does not end in dramatic upheaval. How does it accomplish this feat of an ordinary ending?

The Klesmer couple configures gain as a loss. They willingly abandon the family fortune of the Arrowpoints as if it were a poisonous appendage. In doing so they give themselves the "pure gift," which in Derrida's words,

should have the generosity to give nothing that surprises and appears as gift, *nothing that presents itself as present, nothing that is*; it should therefore be surprising enough and so thoroughly made up of a surprise that is not even a question of getting over it, thus of a surprise surprising enough to let itself be forgotten without delay. And at stake in this forgetting that carries beyond any present is the gift as remaining [*restance*] without memory, without permanence and consistency, without substance or subsistence; at stake is this rest that is, without being (it), beyond Being, *epekeina tes ousias*.⁴⁶

By foregoing the gift of inheritance, the Klesmer couple has reached the state that Derrida has thus characterized as the "pure gift." When Mrs. Arrowpoint draws a line in the sand by making it clear that the marriage would disinherit her daughter, Klesmer responds by conflating fortune with misfortune: "Madam, her fortune has been the only thing I have had to regret about her" (248). The couple thus abdicates any relation to the loss-gain formula that holds Gwendolen in its grip.

The reversal of Tasso's tragic violation of social proprieties in the Klesmer subplot starkly contrasts with the main narrative account of Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt: here, too, the inheritance of a gift plays a significant role. Whereas the Klesmer couple freely rejects the passing on of the Arrowpoint family fortune, the already married Gwendolen is in no position to return the gift of Grandcourt's former mistress Mrs. Glasher. On the day of her marriage to Mr. Grandcourt, Mrs. Glasher has a couple of valuable diamonds delivered to Gwendolen. These diamonds were Grandcourt's gift of love to his former mistress. They represent gain. Here, however, the gift is poisonous. The inheritance of the diamonds is deeply fraught: "It was as if an adder had lain on them" (358). They embody what Derrida has described as the constitutive feature of a *pharmakon*: they exemplify a gift that is a curse.⁴⁷

46. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 147.

47. See Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 63–171.

The narrator dwells on the lethal residue of inheritance: "Truly here were poisonous germs and the poison had entered into this poor young creature" (359). In a "spell-bound" state Gwendolen reads Lydia Glasher's letter and "suddenly" gives in to "a new spasm of terror." When Grandcourt sees her in this disposition, he wonders whether this is "a fit of madness" (359). Such dementia does not take hold of Klesmer. Klesmer and Catherine walk in the footsteps of the Italian poet when they denounce the hierarchical code that dictates the proper marriage arrangement for high-ranking women. Why does their plot nevertheless contrast with that of Tasso (and by implication that of Gwendolen)? They not only threaten but enact a break with societal stratifications, whereas Tasso, as Goethe's play repeatedly emphasizes, lacks room for action. Tasso lives in a state of servitude where action is prohibited ("Das Handeln bleibt mir untersagt").⁴⁸ Conversely, Gwendolen marries in order to gain socially as well as economically. As result of a marriage arrangement, she falls prey to something resembling madness (if only temporarily).

Most important, the fit of dementia takes place at precisely the point where the opposition between gain and loss disintegrates into a state of coincidence: the one who gains loses. When Gwendolen dimly perceives the emptiness of gain, the meanings of the social order that has sustained her sense of reality collapse. A void opens up. This emptiness results from the momentary sight of the now apparent gulf that divides the signifier (gain) from the signified (which turns out to be loss).

As Jacques Lacan has extensively discussed, normal psychological functions depend on the quilting point where signifier and signified are knotted together.⁴⁹ The ends of this point have been tenuously sewn together at the moment when the copiousness of meaning, which the signifier potentially signifies, has been reduced to and firmly identified with one specific signified. When experience contradicts this identification (as is the case when gain turns out to be loss), the quilting point breaks asunder. This is precisely the case at the moment and place (Mr. Grandcourt's luxurious mansion) where Gwendolen realizes that Mrs. Glasher's gift is poisonous. She dimly recognizes then that the sign "gain" has such a superabundance of meaning that it can in fact announce the opposite of the only significance the subject has so far invested in it.

48. Goethe, *Torquato Tasso* 4.3.2549, in his *Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Erich Trunz (Noerdlingen: Beck, 1989).

49. See Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, book 3, 1955–1956, trans. Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), 268–323.

Gwendolen manages to come to terms with reality by suppressing this recognition. She thus does not completely identify with the unscrupulousness implicit in the pursuit of personal gain, as represented by her financier husband Grandcourt. Instead, she appeases her scruples by focusing her attention on Deronda as someone who, she imagines, calls into question that which she nevertheless does (namely, marrying Grandcourt in order to advance socially and financially).⁵⁰ This then is her unknown known: the desire for supremacy causes the experience of failure. It is precisely this overlap between gain and loss that Klesmer, as a truly fortunate modern-day Tasso, announces when he depicts his fiancée's inheritance as a poisonous burden.

IV. GOETHE'S *IPHIGENIE* AND THE EQUALITY OF ATHENS AND JERUSALEM

In her revision of the Tasso motif, Eliot introduces the element of ethnic tension. As we have seen, Mrs. Arrowpoint takes exception to Klesmer's ethnic background. Goethe's play, by contrast, exclusively focuses on the Italian poet's presumed violation of the hierarchical social code that governs marriage arrangements. But Gillian Beer has pointed out that these two spheres were closely interlinked with each other in Victorian writing and thought: "The fascination with race is for many Victorian writers essentially a fascination with class. Race and class raise the same questions of descent, genealogy, nobility, the possibility of development and transformation."⁵¹

The novel alludes to another of Goethe's Weimar plays, one which revolves around the contrast between different ethnic communities. This section focuses on allusions to Goethe's *Iphigenie* in the context of Mirah's relation to her brother. The intertextual references to Goethe's *Tasso* and his *Iphigenie* connect the novel's English with its Jewish strand. Both foreground the theme of loss and gain. It is this theme that unites the seemingly piecemeal aspects of the novel. Intertextual references are not ends in themselves in *Daniel Deronda*. Rather, they bring to the fore Eliot's criticism of a narrow conception

50. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, this refusal to identify with a given ideological position paradoxically helps the enactment of ideology: "An ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich person beneath it: 'not all is ideology, beneath the ideological mask, I am also a human person' is the *very form of ideology*, of its 'practical efficiency'" (Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* [London: Verso, 1997], 21).

51. Beer, *Darwin's Plot*, 189.

of national identity.⁵² They instantiate the novel's intrinsic connection with world literature, delineating "the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness.'" ⁵³ The allusions to both Jewish history and the literature of Weimar Classicism connect the novel to transnational literature. Homi K. Bhabha has described transnational writing as follows: "Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrain of world literature."⁵⁴ Strikingly, in his reformulation of the meaning of world literature, Bhabha recuperates Goethe's conception of the term.⁵⁵ Eliot's allusion to two plays by Goethe seems to have a programmatic character, evoking a sense of cultural interconnectedness. Eliot's literary allusions question the validity of national boundaries, foregrounding the isomorphism of self and other.

So I read Eliot's allusions to another Goethe work. In a more pronounced manner than in *Tasso*, in *Iphigenie auf Tauris* Goethe puts on stage the deleterious divide between the civilized and the barbarian. By alluding to Goethe's reworking of Euripides' play, Eliot moves the supposed contrast between gentile and Jew into a wider historical and cultural context. This has an important bearing on Mordecai's Spinozist quest for the formation of a particular identity that does not contradict universalism. He is particularly concerned with redressing the prioritization of the Hellenistic heritage over Jewish history. His endeavor to establish equilibrium between different cultural formations mirrors Klesmer's disregard of hierarchical constructions within the social and the economic spheres. By comparing Mordecai's relation with Mirah to that of Iphigenia and Orestes, *Deronda* implicitly puts the Greek and the Jewish worlds on a par with each other.

52. The foregrounding of these intertextual references contributes to the sense of artistic construction. As Nurbhai and Newton have recently pointed out, it is this sense of the imaginary that distinguishes Eliot's last novel from fiction composed in a realist mode: "What distinguishes Eliot from such writers [as John Buchan and Kipling] is the awareness in her Jewish novel that any literary representation of Jews will be a construction. The novel itself is preoccupied with construction. Deronda constructs his own identity as a Jew and Eliot foregrounds her own literary construction by, for example, creating a polarized relationship between Deronda as Noble Jew and Lapidoth as Evil Jew that functions allegorically" (Nurbhai and Newton, *George Eliot, Judaism and the Novels*, 20).

53. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 12.

54. *Ibid.*

55. See John Pizer's "Goethe's 'World Literature' Paradigm and Contemporary Cultural Globalization," *Comparative Literature* 52 (2000): 213–27.

In his revision of Euripides' *Iphigenie*, Goethe shifts the emphasis away from the relation between gods and men to a concern with intercultural conflict. Whereas in Euripides the deity Artemis asks for human sacrifices, Goethe turns this sacrificial aspect into the main social trait that distinguishes the barbarism of the Taureans from the civilization of the Greeks. Yet the play questions the social and cultural validity of a binary opposition between the civilized and the primitive. Specifically, the second scene of the play presents a conversation between Agamemnon's daughter and Arkas, a messenger of the king of Tauris. In this dialogue Iphigenia conceives of the foreign as the familiar. Here she implicitly alludes to the violence inherent in her own Greek family history (namely, the curse of Atreus). In this way, she comes to understand the barbarism that forms part of her "civilized" home.

Thoas, the King of Tauris, confronts Iphigenia with the history of violence that pertains to her own Greek background.⁵⁶ Goethe's and, by implication, Herder's notion of *Humanität* eludes the binary opposition between civilization and barbarism. Hierarchical rankings of culture result in the perpetration of violence. They are attempts to obfuscate humanity's common debt to nature. The "other" appears in the light of the nonhuman, be it the natural (revealingly, primitive people are called *Naturvölker* in German) or the animalistic. As Adorno astutely observes in his famous essay, "Zum Klassizismus von Goethes *Iphigenie*" (On the Classicism of Goethe's *Iphigenie*), "Iphigenia negotiates the notion of humanity out of the experience of its antinomy."⁵⁷ In Tauris the homely appears to be strange.

When her brother Orestes arrives on the island (just having killed his mother Clytemnestra), he tries to persuade his sister to escape with him without saying goodbye to Thoas. The play here questions the enlightenment's self-understanding as civilization. As Adorno has put it, "by dint of his antithesis to myth Orestes threatens to fall prey to it."⁵⁸ The play centers on Iphigenia's refusal to treat "the barbarian" in a humiliating manner. She informs Thoas of her intention to leave Tauris together with her brother. This news enrages Thoas. Iphigenia's sense of grace, however, soothes him, and he allows her to set sail with Orestes for her Greek homeland.⁵⁹

56. See Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* 5.3.1937–43, in *Goethe's Werke: Band V; Dramatische Dichtungen III*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: Beck, 1989).

57. "Humanität wird in der *Iphigenie* verhandelt aus der Erfahrung ihrer Antinomie heraus" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur: Gesammelte Schriften Band 11*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998], 500).

58. *Ibid.*, 512.

59. See Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* 5.3.1983–91.

In the closing dialogue of the play, Iphigenia does not celebrate the Enlightenment notion of tolerance. Instead, she argues that it is the practice of hospitality that bridges ethnic divisions and conflicts. This final dialogue brings closure to a drama that attempts to renegotiate the meaning of the terms “civilized” and “barbarous.” Why does Goethe avoid the Enlightenment term “tolerance”? As Derrida has recently pointed out, the “word ‘tolerance’ is first of all marked by a religious war between Christians, or between Christians and non-Christians.”⁶⁰ Most important, this concept introduces a hierarchical divide between those who are tolerant and those who are tolerated.

This is why Derrida prefers the notion of hospitality to that of tolerance. The former engages with the foreign from within a non-hierarchical context, while the latter only refrains from the physical extinction of what appears to be strange or alien:

But tolerance remains scrutinized hospitality, always under surveillance, parsimonious and protective of its sovereignty. . . . We offer hospitality only on the condition that the other follows our rules, our way of life, even our language, our culture, our political system, and so on. That is hospitality as it is commonly understood and practiced, a hospitality that gives rise, with certain conditions, to regulated practices, laws, and conventions on a national and international—indeed, as Kant says in a famous text, a “cosmopolitan”—scale. . . . Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality *itself*, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign *visitor*, as a new *arrival*, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of *visitation* rather than *invitation*.⁶¹

Derrida takes issue with the implicit hierarchical gradation that “tolerance,” as “scrutinized” hospitality, establishes between those who invite and those who are invited. An invitation unfolds according to “regulated practices, laws, and conventions.” Iphigenia, by contrast, undergoes what Derrida calls a visitation while enjoying Thoas’s hospitality. She realizes that her Greek standard of civilization fails to establish her superiority if confronted with the assumed barbarism of Tauris. Iphigenia thus recognizes how civilization is sustained by the copresence of its fantasized other: how barbarism always already exists on equal terms with the civilized aspirations of Greek culture. This collapse of binary oppositions is not confined to the supposedly

60. Jacques Derrida, quoted in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 126.

61. *Ibid.*, 128–29.

self-referential realm of language. It has social consequences because it confounds the hierarchical construction of what it means to be Greek (civilized) or non-Greek (barbarian).

In her closing dialogue with Thoas, Iphigenia does not engage in a legal or political discourse. Rather, she depicts the prospect of a future interaction between the homely and the strange that unfolds via visitation rather than invitation. A “friendly hospitality” (freundlich Gastrecht) will bridge the gulf between different cultural communities. The different thus remains different but is no longer separated from that which seemingly opposes it. Now disconnected difference becomes familiar. Significantly, Iphigenia includes Thoas in her family. At the end of the play, she emphasizes that his difference has in fact entered her family home, and she no longer considers his strangeness in a detached political manner (what Derrida calls “sovereignty” in the quote above) as a separated sphere of existence. Even though he is not related to her family, Iphigenia admits him into her kinship group. This becomes abundantly clear when she calls him “father”:

Ein freundlich Gastrecht walte
 Von dir zu uns, so sind wir nicht auf ewig
 Getrennt und abgeschieden. Wert und teuer
 Wie mein Vater war, so bist Du's mir,
 Und dieser Eindruck bleibt in meiner Seele.

[A friendly hospitality prevails / between us (moving from you to us),
 so that we are not eternally / separated and cut off. Valuable and dear /
 As my father was, so you are to me, / and this impression will remain in
 my soul.]⁶²

Hospitality denaturalizes geographic and cultural separation. Significantly, Iphigenia does not depict the Greeks as initiators of this cordial relationship. Rather, the “friendly hospitality” of which she speaks traces the itinerary of a visitation: it moves from Tauris to Greece (“Von dir zu uns”). It literally arrives on Greek shores as a visitor.

The intertextual reference to Goethe's drama about Iphigenia is significant for a new understanding of Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. In this context, it is worth inspecting the points where allusions to the Iphigenia motif occur in the novel. Long before Deronda discovers that he is a Jew, he compares the Jewish plot of the novel to Greek myth. The specific myth is that of Orestes and Iphigenia: he associates Mirah's search for her brother with that of Orestes for his lost sister. “To Deronda this event of finding Mirah was as heart-stirring as anything that

62. Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* 5.3.2154–57. The translation is mine.

befell Orestes or Rinaldo" (205). Against the conventions of his time, Deronda puts the Jewish and the classical/Christian worlds (Rinaldo's Crusade context is depicted in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*) on a par with each other. Nineteenth-century anti-Semitism equated the Jews with the barbarians and contrasted them with the civilized Greeks. Deronda, by contrast, shows as much empathy for the life of contemporary Jewry as he does for the texts and artifacts of ancient Greece: "Deronda had as reverential an interest in Mordecai and Mirah as he could have had in the offspring of Agamemnon" (544). In an intriguing parallel to Goethe's play *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, Deronda is not Mirah's kin, just as the "barbarian" Thoas is not Iphigenia's father, but Deronda nevertheless becomes accepted as a proper father figure. (Agamemnon, Iphigenia's biological father, famously set out to sacrifice his daughter; Artemis saves the latter and transports her to Tauris where, in Goethe's account, Thoas acts like a true father.) In this way the allusions to Goethe's play relate Jews (perceived as "barbarians") to the Greeks. Through a creative reworking of Goethe's play, Jews are associated with the Greeks while almost celebrating the difference. The Jewish past becomes as relevant as the Greek past in Eliot's oeuvre.

The redemption of the Jewish past was a burning question for various Jewish writers and thinkers in the nineteenth century. Leopold Zunz, who, together with the poet Heinrich Heine, was one of the active members of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews), strongly believed that anti-Semitism and assimilation would ring in the end of Jewish history.⁶³ Zunz embarked on historiographical research in order to give Judaism "a dignified burial."⁶⁴ With his thorough scholarly work, he set out to rescue the future remembrance of Jewish history. Eliot highlights this state of affairs when she cites a key passage from Zunz's *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* as the epigraph for chapter 42:

Wenn es eine Stufenleiter von Leiden gibt, so hat Israel die höchste Staffel erstiegen; wenn die Dauer der Schmerzen und die Geduld, mit welcher sie ertragen werden, adeln, so nehmen es die Juden mit den Hochgeborenen aller Länder auf; wenn eine Literatur reich genannt wird, die wenige klassische Trauerspiele besitzt, welcher Platz gebührt dann einer Tragödie die anderthalb Jahrtausende währt, gedichtet und dargestellt von den Helden selber?

63. For a detailed discussion of Leopold Zunz and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 207–40.

64. I am indebted to long-standing discussion with Paul Mendes-Flohr (University of Chicago and Hebrew University, Jerusalem) about all this. See Mendes-Flohr's *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence of all the nations—if the duration of sorrows and the patience with which they are borne ennoble, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land—if a literature is called rich in the possession of few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a National Tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors were also the heroes? (517)

This quote is more than a *cri de coeur*: it goes to the heart of the contrast between Jew and Greek that structures the novel's Iphigenia theme. Zunz depicts Jewish history in aristocratic terms by relating it to the world of suffering that constitutes Greek tragedy. Jews, despised and condemned to endure with patience centuries filled with pain, exist in a state of abjection equivalent to that of the ancient Greeks, who epitomize nobility. Here loss clearly becomes gain.

According to Zunz, the derided Jews outdo the revered Greeks in Greekness: whereas the Greeks only composed a few tragedies, Jewish history constitutes a tragedy that reaches from the contemporary age back to the mythic time of the Hebrew Bible. The whole history of the Jews therefore represents the work of art, which can only fragmentarily be found in Greek tragedies. The demoted life of the Jews, in actual fact, presents ("gedichtet und dargestellt von den Helden selber") that of which the writings and artifacts of ancient Greece are only fantasized representations.

This quotation from Zunz's *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* introduces a chapter in which the relation between Greek and Jew (Iphigenia and Mirah) moves into a Spinozist context. Mordecai, whom Deronda previously compared to Iphigenia's brother Orestes, here engages in a discussion about the Jewish past at the pub, The Hand and Banner, which is the regular meeting place of the club "The Philosophers." In this philosophical society, Mordecai discusses Spinoza's work within the context of affiliations and disaffiliations with the Jewish past:

Baruch Spinoza had not a faithful Jewish heart, though he had sucked the life of his intellect at the breasts of Jewish tradition. He laid bare his father's nakedness and said, "They who scorn him have the higher wisdom." Yet Baruch Spinoza confessed, he saw not why Israel should not again be a chosen nation. Who says that the history of and literature of our race are dead? Are they not as living as the history and literature of Greece and Rome, which have inspired revolutions, enkindled the thought of Europe, and made the unrighteous powers tremble? These were an inheritance dug from the tomb. Ours is an inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames. (536)

In the first part of his statement, Mordecai refers to Spinoza's heresy: he compares the seventeenth-century philosopher to the biblical Ham who uncovered his father Noah. Yet the *herem* (ban), which the

Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam imposed upon Spinoza, did not result in a complete disaffiliation with Jewish history. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza nurtures the possibility that the Jews will “establish once more their independent state, and that God will again choose them.”⁶⁵ Mordecai, who characterizes Spinoza as a rationalist philosopher, argues that Enlightenment thought does not necessarily demote the past to insignificance. At this point it becomes apparent why Eliot translates the term “Tragödie,” which Zunz employs to describe Jewish history, as a “National Tragedy.” As has been intimated above, Zunz did not believe in the futurity of Jewish history. He feared that Enlightenment thought and modern culture would do away with Jewish difference. Mordecai, by contrast, argues for the compatibility between cultural/religious difference and the rationality of an enlightened philosopher such as Spinoza.

Here the term “nation” denotes not the homogenous but the diverse. Modernity cannot do without particularity (that is, national identities) if it wants to avoid the homogeneity of a monolithic state, which would of course in itself be an unacknowledged particular entity (as Žižek has argued “one should fully accept the paradoxical fact that the dimension of universality is always sustained by the fixation on some particular point”).⁶⁶ Mordecai therefore questions an understanding of universality that obfuscates its particularity: “Can a fresh-made garment of citizenship weave itself straightway into the flesh and change the slow deposit of eighteen centuries? What is the citizenship of him who walks among a people he has no hearty kindred and fellowship with, and has lost the sense of brotherhood with his own race? It is a charter of selfish ambition and rivalry in low greed” (528). The garment represents the imposition of a monolithic abstraction upon the embodied forms of human diversity. Like Spinoza, Mordecai opts for the heretical act of uncovering. Both thinkers repeat Ham’s sacrilege against the father figure: Spinoza became a heretic by offending the religious orthodoxy of his time, and in a different but related way Mordecai, walking in the footsteps of the maverick Enlightenment thinker Herder, introduces the open acknowledgment of particularity into the universality of rationalist thought.

How does particularity manifest itself? According to Mordecai, it denotes the vitality of the past within the changed context of the present. This survival of the past within the here and now defines Jewish history. Gentile society reveres the ancient Greeks precisely because they are dead (“were an inheritance dug from the tomb”),

65. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 47.

66. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 104.

and it despises the Jews on account of their persistence. Anti-Semitism gives rise to a fantasy of life that cannot be put to death, that is so filled with enjoyment that its vitality constantly renews itself. This then is the supposed threat of the Jews: life that does not need to fear death.⁶⁷ Mordecai emphasizes this phantasmagoria of unquenchable life that spurs anti-Semitism: "Ours is an inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames." This contrast between ancient Greeks as inhabitants of the tomb and Jews as bearers of eternal life has a point of reference in the historiography of Heinrich Graetz.

Between 1853 and 1870 Graetz set out to counter anti-Semitism as well as to revive a sense of Jewish identity by writing a multivolume *History of the Jews* from biblical times to contemporary Europe. In the concluding volume of this truly monumental work, Graetz gives an etiology of anti-Semitism. Here he formulates the contrast between death (ancient Greece as adored in present-day German culture) and eternal life (the survival of the Jews), which Eliot's Mordecai implicitly picks up in his speech about Spinoza and the redemption of the past within the present (Eliot was of course familiar with Graetz's magnum opus). Graetz asks his readers how we can account for the fact that modern German culture discriminates against Jewish civilization and lavishes praise on Greek and Roman antiquity. Like Eliot's Mordecai, he explains this discrepancy with reference to the presence of an ongoing and vital Jewish culture within the contemporary world. Rather than being praised for their cultural achievements, the Jews are discriminated against precisely because they, unlike the ancient Hellenes, continue to exist.⁶⁸

As a result of their continued existence, the Jews are perceived as a threat: "Jaundiced malignity and hatred are silent at the grave of the illustrious man; his merits as enumerated there are, in fact, as a rule overrated. . . . Just because of their continued existence, the merits and moral attainments of the Hebrews are not generally acknowledged."⁶⁹ Mordecai develops and deepens Graetz's critique of both anti-Semitism and the cult of Hellenism when he pinpoints Jewish survival as the stone of offense that gives rise to all kinds of feelings

67. For a brilliant discussion of a similar return of the dead in Honoré de Balzac's *Le Colonel Chabert*, see Cathy Caruth, "The Claims of the Dead: History, Haunted Property, and the Law," *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2002): 419–41.

68. For a detailed discussion of Heinrich Graetz's response to anti-Semitism, see Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew*, 98–107.

69. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, vol. 5, *From the Chmielnicki Persecution of the Jews in Poland (1648 C.E.) to the Present Time (1870 C.E.)*, trans. Bella Löwy (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1895), 707.

of envy and rivalry. Why does the continuation of life provoke such outbursts of hatred? The arrest of movement, that is to say, the freezing of a living process, establishes the decipherment of its purported meaning: “immobility,” as Žižek writes, “makes a thing visible.”⁷⁰ The literature and the artifacts of ancient Greece are significant because they belong to a bygone civilization: their past is literally passed (in the words of Mordecai, it belongs to the tomb).

Ancient Jewish customs are “alive while dead”: they bridge the gulf between the deadness of prehistory and the palpitation that runs through present day life (Mordecai’s “inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames”). This very paradox makes Judaism “insignificant” in the eyes of the English society in which *Deronda* has been brought up. The past that has not been frozen but continues to live in the present provokes anger in those who structure their lives according to a differentiation between the contingency and meaninglessness of the past (be it “primitive,” “Jewish,” or “superstitious”) and the goal-oriented significance of history’s progress, of which the current state of affairs is, of course, the culmination. As Žižek has put it, “Life is the horrible palpitation of the ‘lamella,’ the non-subjective (‘acephalous’) undead drive which persists beyond ordinary death; death is the symbolic order itself, the structure which, as a parasite, colonizes the living entity.”⁷¹ By questioning the symbolic order, *Deronda* walks in the footsteps of Goethe’s Tasso and Iphigenia. By putting himself into the place of those who have been excluded by this order, he finds his life and his inheritance. The novel turns the common understanding of meaning and significance upside down. It traverses the chain of signification so that the insignificant turns into the significant and loss reemerges as gain.

70. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 87.

71. *Ibid.*, 89.